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Serving the Storyline of the Novel: The Powerful Role of the Feudal Servant-Narrator

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The Powerful Role of the Feudal Servant Narrator

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Abstract

This thesis addresses issues of class as represented through the narrative agency exercised by the servant-narrator in *Castle Rackrent* and *Wuthering Heights*. Thady Quirk and Ellen Dean are servant-narrators who strategically use feigned allegiance, astute perception, and selective disclosure to wield power over the lives of their masters. These "arts of subordination" allow the servant-narrator to tell his or her own life narrative, while appearing to share the masters' memoirs. While both servant-narrators are motivated by economic means, Ellen Dean's involvement throughout Wuthering Heights is further complicated by her desires of emotional connection. However, each servant-narrator achieves his or her goals by manipulating the events and relationships that constitute his or her masters' lives.

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Introduction

The narrator in Victorian literature ushers the reader through a particular set of events, and therefore wields a considerable amount of power over the actual story line being retold. Acting as an intermediary voice between an actual event and one's perception of said event transforms the narrator into a filter through which actions are later perceived. Embodying the narrator in a distinct human form within the novel directly complicates the foundation of the story. Due to the explicit humanity present in characters of Victorian literature, these individuals are subject to the desires centered on preserving the self. The servant-narrator is no exception. Since the narrator is unable to directly expose the reader to the actual events of the plot line, any account of these events is ultimately filtered through the narrator's subjective perception.

This often-unacknowledged interaction between narrator and reader becomes even more complicated when the narrator, in reference to the other characters, is also a member of a subordinate group in society. A controversy arises, because by definition a subordinate is an individual whom social status has been denied. However, as it has already been stated, the act of narration in and of itself provides the narrator with substantial power. This contradicts the social belief "that the dominators [the higher class] have monopolized the power to represent, while the dominated [the subordinate class] have had no option but to endure passively through centuries of abusive synecdoche" (Robbins ix), because in writing the dominated take an active role in their lives. While it is typically true that "the ordinary town proletariat, the people who make the wheels go round, have always been ignored by novelists" (Orwell cited in Robbins 4), there exist certain circumstances within literature where this population is given physical representation. For example, an individual whose identity consists solely on the manual labor of a servant

actively creates room to tell his or her own narrative through the act of telling the masters' story line.

Even if this narration is perceived as only venerating the master, as a result of the servant doubling as the narrator, he or she is simultaneously disempowered and empowered. This contradiction in power inhibits the servant from being perceived as a transparent window through which the story is transmitted. Like any other character, the servant-narrator is vulnerable to the same biased human qualities of the entire race. The servant-narrator is simultaneously susceptible to the motivating desires of the inferior. Due to this, the servant-narrator's aspiration to direct the story is only amplified by his or her subordinate position. However, the subordinate position in itself inhibits the expression of power and demands that all power available to the servant be strategically disguised. This concealment has resulted in many servant narrators being interpreted as relatively transparent and uncomplicated figures whose sole purpose is to retain and recount the events pertaining to their masters' lives (Neill). Therefore, while it is true that the masters in Victorian literature have an unconditional power over their external environment, their servants exert a potentially equal or greater power that differs only in applicability. Servants have power in relation to that of their masters', because this power of unconscious influence can readily be hidden from society.

However, not all servants have the ability to effectively exert control over their master's environment, which in turn provides this power. For instance, the proletariats are often perceived as a more empowered servants, due to the fact that they are "wage earners collectively, especially those who have no capital and who depend for sustenance on their daily labour; the working class" (OED). While the proletariat is dependent upon the performance of work, he or she is not dependent on the master per say. Due to the fact that the proletariat has the theoretical

power to actively choose which master to follow and the freedom to decide which job to perform, he or she is perceived as higher in social class than the feudal servant. However, by distancing oneself from the personal relationship with one's masters that results from such as dependency, the proletarian does not engage in the "arts of subordination" necessary to manipulate the servant-master relationship.

It is, in fact, the perception of the feudal servant as unconditionally loyal that creates the appropriate environment for this servant, who acting as narrator, directs the story line of their masters' lives in order to tell of their own lives. It remains a possibility that servants could "use their 'servant' status as inferiors, outsiders who are also insiders, to mock the complacencies of English society" (Tracy 10). In doing so, the servant relies on their repertoire of socially acceptable behaviors in order to intertwine the fate of their masters along with their own. As a result, it may appear that "the colonized may seem docile, even loyal. But often they chafe under alien rule and plot to subvert it" (Tracy 9). The empowered feudal servant narrator is only capable of exerting power in relation to the master's power and therefore the master unconsciously provides the agency necessary for the servant's acquisition of power. This effectively creates a circular bond of dependency uniting the lower and upper classes within society.

Robbins asserts that throughout "the development of the English novel, developed voices like those of Ellen Dean and Thady Quirk make up a vigorous but subordinate tradition" (112). Therefore, this senior thesis aims to provide a more detailed depiction of how exactly these two characters, Ellen Dean and Thady Quirk, go about subverting the class based authority that encompasses their respective lives. What "arts of subordination" are both socially appropriate

for a feudal servant to engage in? To what extent does this agency not only provide power over their masters' lives but also over the separate life of the servant?

Chapter One introduces Maria Edgeworth's most noteworthy servant narrator, Thady Quirk. By narrating *Castle Rackrent*, Thady leads the reader through the history of the Rackrent estate and therefore the story of the Rackrent family. Through his voluntary narrative, Thady interjects within the dialogue allusions to his relationships with the Rackrents, himself, and his son, Jason. The feudal nature of Thady's relationship with the Rackrent family effectively makes him a member of two different households: the Rackrents as well as the Quirks. These accounts of human interaction reveal that Thady truly is a very early example of a master in the "art of subordination". By pathetically professing his loyalty to the ambiguous family, he creates room within the family and therefore the narrative to observe, reflect, and shape both the actual events of the story and how these events are perceived for future generations. In this act Thady reveals his control over both the present and the future of his masters' lives. Therefore, Thady's role of a servant that has resulted in his subordinate social class also provides the means to achieve his ultimate goal and rise within the economic structure of society.

In Chapter Two, the introduction of Emily Bronte's Ms. Dean[1] as the servant and narrator of *Wuthering Heights* provides both an elaboration on the role of the empowered feudal servant narrator. Like Thady, Ellen Dean overcomes the assumed powerlessness of servitude by not only feigning alliance to her masters' family, but also she strategically manipulates the relationships of those around her. Her astute perceptions and selective disclosure allow her to construct this environment and therefore makes room for herself as not only a servant caring for

[1] When referring to the character of Ms. Dean as a servant who is narrating her masters' story I will reference her as Ellen; however, when referring to Ms. Dean as a servant who is really explaining her own narrative she will be spoken of using her nickname, Nelly.

the masters' physical needs but also as a confidant by appearing to care for their emotional needs. Through these "arts of subordination" Ellen is able to achieve the economic security originally denied to her by her masters.

Chapter Three acknowledges Ms. Dean as an important character within the novel and as a result discusses her actions in reference to the motives that drive her character. Her situation is complicated by the fact that she is simultaneously an insider and an outsider within the family. Therefore, Ellen must use these "arts of subordination" to not just steal economic stability from her masters, but also she needs to use the relationships with her masters to create emotional security too. Due to this complication, Ellen is seen to have a more potent, however intricate, power. As McCarthy rightfully proclaims, "Nelly is right at the center; take her away and there would be no novel at all" (56). Since without Nelly, there would be no story, the main character of this story is not the ones the majority of the action focuses on, but instead it is the narrator herself. Once Nelly is recognized as the main character of *Wuthering Heights*, the novel must be retold focusing on the autobiographic story line of Nelly. This is accomplished by analyzing her emotional relationships as an additional motivation for her actions.

While Chapter One reveals that Thady Quirk uses the agency provided to him as a means of establishing his own patriarchal lineage, Chapter Three shows how Nelly uses her own agency to not only establish a physical home but also an emotional place of belonging as well. Using the skills that Chapter Two shows to be socially accessible to Nelly, she creates a world in which the future is one of her own construction. In light of this Emily Bronte's masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights*, is no longer an explicit love story, but instead it is the story of one woman's role in her own rise to power and influence over the social hierarchy that surrounding her.

Chapter One

Thady Quirk: The Generic Servant

Maria Edgworth introduces Thady Quirk, an early exemplar of the servant-narrator (Tracy 17), in the preface of Castle Rackrent as nothing more than a transparent guide through the story line of the Rackrent family history. However, the diction of the actual memoirs depicts Thady as one who, in fact, does not "simply pour forth anecdotes and retell conversations with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town" (Edgeworth 3). Instead, Thady proves through his construction and manipulation of the syntax that he actively chooses to describe this particular history that he has "learned the masters' language" (Tracy 24). As a result of this acquired skill, Thady uses the act of narration to construct *Castle Rackrent* to be both "the account of a loyal servant, [and] the account of a servant who is actually master" (Tracy 11). In voluntarily narrating[2] this Rackrent biography Thady situates himself within the history of the family and changes this perceived biography into an autobiography. Through the depictions of relationships with his masters (the Rackrents), himself, and his son (Jason) Thady Quirk transcends his role as servant and effectively becomes the "central character" (Tracy 17) of his own narration.

Although literary analysis has traditionally overlooked the subtleties of Thady's strategic intelligence due to the unconditional loyalty that he shows to the Rackrent family, more recent readings have revealed an ambivalent relationship with this family (Neill; Cochran). Thady's reputation as the "innocent figure, a loyal retainer and naïve admirer of the family whose 'honor' he endlessly professes to guard, and whose 'friendship' he pathetically treasures" (Neill 78) is called into question when one thinks of his role as more representative of a slave or feudal

[2] Cochran claims, "the root of Thady's contradictions of character, as well as of Edgeworth's motivations, lies in Thady's position as the voluntary narrator of his story" (61).

servant than that of a proletariat. While Thady labels himself a servant, the fact of the matter remains that he is serving the same family that his grandfather once served (Edgeworth 9) and is seldom, if ever, paid for his labor. Despite how Thady verbally describes himself, the role he occupies within the social dynamic of the time is representative of a feudal servant whose dependence is upon the relationship with his masters and not merely the money the master provides in exchange for labor. This effectively labels Thady's narrative as what Cochran calls a "slave narration"[3] (59).

Edgeworth allows for the possibility that Thady's relationship with the Rackrent family is more representative of that of a slave than a proletariat servant through Thady's voluntary narrative of the Rackrent history. The editor of *Castle Rackrent,* charged with recording Thady's verbal recount of the story, exists as the most forceful advocate of Thady's unquestioned truthfulness as seen in the preface when he claims, "those who were acquainted with the manners of a certain class of the gentry of Ireland some years ago, will want no evidence of the truth of honest Thady's narrative" (Edgeworth 4). Possessing a relationship wherein one's masters have complete trust and faith in a servant's word is in and of itself an extremely powerful tool, because it provides space for unsuspected manipulation. Tracy acknowledges that servants create this strategic positioning within the master-servant relationships, because they "fashion for themselves the mask their masters expected to see, that of uncritical, even enthusiastic loyalty" (Tracy 12). In light of this social-class interaction, the fact that Thady never "knew not what to say for the honor of the family – But [instead, he] made the best of a bad case, and laid it all at [his] lady's door, for [he] did not like *her* any how" (Edgeworth 12) reveals his construction of

[3] As Cochran proclaims, "slave narrators, owing to their desire to provide an acceptably authentic text and to appeal to their readership, typically adopted a narrative stance that marked them as sympathetic characters" (59).

this personal space.

Thady does not devalue his relationship with the Rackrent family by professing hostile feelings towards the ex-wives of the Rackrent men. While the Rackrent women come and go throughout the history of Castle Rackrent, it is the men through which this estate passes. Therefore, Thady's alliance is consistently with the Rackrent men, because the blood shared between these individuals makes them members of the same family. For this reason, the men are always a part of the family and it is not within Thady's power to label them "quite as a foreigner, and not at all any longer as part of the family" (Edgeworth 36) as he ritually does after each woman departs the narrative.

While this distance in familial relations allows Thady to vocalize (on more than one occasion) his distaste for the Rackrent women, he must rely on subtler cues to vocalize his feelings concerning the Rackrent men. It has been proposed that Thady achieves this through his role "as narrator, Thady is a kind of mirror, in which the Rackrents see themselves as they imagine themselves to be, lords of creation. But it is also a cracked and distorting mirror, showing the foolish Rackrents as noble even as it reveals that they are fools" (Tracy 13). Therefore, Thady's narrative provides a verbal reflection upon the story line of his masters' lives. Thady uses this distorted reflection to project a latent message of unfeigned reverence as well as a message of dissent that is manifested in the subtle context clues provided to the reader.

One example of this distorted reflection is when Thady attempts to provide an example of how successful a lawyer his master, Sir Murtagh, is. Thady proclaims, "Out of forty-nine suits which he had, he never lost one but seventeen…" (Edgeworth 15). However, when one sits back to analyze this statement, the reader sees that winning thirty-two cases out of forty-nine is only a sixty-five percent success rate. Therefore, Sir Murtagh only wins a little over half of his cases.

By no means does this make him worthy of the praise that Thady apparently bestows upon him. While Thady's performance at first appears unnecessary, "then we begin to realize that Thady is the gainer form the foolish behaviour he records and praises. As manipulative servant he controls his masters, as narrator he controls the narrative" (Tracy 11). However, Thady praises this alleged success in the presence of the family in a subtle enough way that allows him to truly portray his master without anyone questioning his intention. Thady does not limit his ridicule for only Sir Murtagh, but repeatedly "he appears to honor the legacy of the Rackrents while exposing all of their baser qualities. Thus, Thady returns to the conflicted position of slave narrator—both conciliatory and condemnatory—in the act of telling his own story" (Cochran 70).

Thady's feigned allegiance is most notably seen in his relationship with Sir Condy, who was "ever [Thady's] great favorite" (Edgeworth 37). In the introduction to Sir Condy's section of Maria Edgeworth's short novel, Thady describes that "Sir Condy Rackrent, by the grace of God heir at law to the Castle Rackrent estate, was a remote branch of the family: born to little or no fortune of his own**,** he was bred to the bar" (Edgeworth 38). However, Thady coyly conceals his dominant role in the breeding of Sir Condy. Since Thady is the narrator of this story for the outside reader, one must also assume that he is the narrator of the family's history for the family itself.

Due to Thady's power over the narration of the Rackrent history, "he has entered fully into the Rackrents' myth about themselves even as he cynically manipulates that myth" (Tracy 21). By revealing to the reader that Sir Condy "loved to sit on my knee whilst I told him stories of the family and the blood from which he was sprung, and how he might look forward, if the then present man should die without childer, to being at the head of the Castle Rackrent estate"

(Edgeworth 38-39), Thady discloses to the astute observer the agency of his power. By reflecting onto a child all of the downfalls of his ancestry in a way that makes them seem good qualities to have, he effectively instills those same values into the child. Therefore, even though it appears that because Sir Condy is so far removed in lineage and environmental upbringing from his elders he should not suffer form their character flaws, Sir Condy still does. This shows there are "dichotomies that can arise between what is said and what is meant" (Tracy 11) within Thady's narrative. While he repeatedly uses the English language to profess his allegiance to the family, he strategically structures these words to bring about his own agenda.

This professed allegiance is seen extremely clearly in the plot line surrounding the whisky punch. When describing Sir Condy early in the narrative, Thady argues for Sir Condy's right to drink his whiskey punch when he pleases: "all he asked, God bless him! Was to live in peace and quietness, and have his bottle, or his whiskey punch at night to himself. – Now this was little enough, for be sure, for any gentleman, but my lady couldn't abide the smell of the whiskey punch" (Edgeworth 49). While none would argue that this statement alone appears completely harmless, when it is paired with the fact "that Sir Condy meets his death, with Thady at his side to help him to his dying, as Thady had helped him to his penury" (Newcomer 151) by providing him with not only the horn filled with whiskey, but also the desire to live up to the revered stories of his ancestors Thady's direct involvement is undeniable. As a result, through Thady's allegiance to the family and the length of this loyalty[4], he creates a role for himself as

[4] "The events in the novel are purported to have occurred "prior to 1782" so we must assume that Sir Condy died at some point before 1782, at which time Thady was over ninety years old ("being now upwards of fourscore and ten years of age" (70)" (Glover, 300). Thady is the only individual in this short novel that has remained aligned with the family for so long. As a result of the time he has been a servant to the Rackrents he knows more than any member of the family.

keeper of family history. Thady uses his voluntary narrative[5] to structure the future in accordance with the past as a means of controlling the lives of his masters.

The niche of voluntary storyteller provides Thady the room to not only decide which aspects of the Rackrent history to include and which to exclude, but also it allows him to structure the narrative to tell any story he wishes. It has been proposed by other literary theorists, "under the guise of celebrating the Rackrents, Thady is writing his own autobiography" (Tracy 17). Historically, the common belief was that Thady was not intelligent enough to deceive those around him, and therefore tehse claims were not given much credibility. However, I assert that his ability to be perceived as dimwitted acts to show his mastery over not only the English language, but also over the master-slave relationship. The truth found in the syntax of this short novel is that "…although Thady's focus during the story concentrates almost wholly on the four Rackrents, he begins by making a few statements about himself, making clear to the reader that he is both the center and the shaper of his story" (Cochran 62). While Thady professes from the very beginning of his narrative that "…as I have lived so will I die, true and loyal to *the family*. – The family of the Rackrents is, I am proud to say, one of the most ancient in the kingdom" (Edgeworth 8), Glover is very eager to proclaim that

> The use of italics to foreground 'the family' and the subsequent reference to the Rackrents lead us to assume that these signifiers have the same referent, but as we shall see it is not entirely clear to which family-the Rackrents, or the Quirks (the one 'in which he was bred and born') -Thady's partiality is directed. (298)

The ambiguity of this language becomes extremely important when an in depth analysis of the most basic element of Thady Quirk is conducted. Literary theorist Duggan has discovered that "Thady is in fact Teague or Teig, in Irish Tadhg, a common name but one with political and even literary overtones. Teague became Anglo-Ireland's general name for any Irishman after

[5] Literary analysis, Tracy declares, "the colonized may seem docile, even loyal. But often they chafe under alien rule and plot to subvert it" (9).

about 1640…later Teague became the generic name for an Irish man-servant" (cited in Tracy 14). Due to Thady's namesake he embodies the Irish man-servant in every respect. This in and of itself would grant him the personal intelligence to adequately understand and therefore strategically reflect upon the master-slave relationship. However, Neil allows for Thady's ingenuity to be taken a step further by revealing the meaning behind Thady's last name, Quirk: "'A verbal trick, subtlety, shift or evasion; a quibble, quibbling argument', or (by extension) 'The employment of quirks; quibbling' (OED n., 1a-b)" (Neill 88). Therefore, Thady is not only bestowed with the ability to understand the master-slave relationship and appropriately reflect upon that, but in conjunction with the meaning of Quirk, he has the capabilities of using verbal trickery to manipulate said relationship. In light of this, the reader must first question whether one's name is meant to foreshadow one's personality. If this intent is given to Maria Edgeworth then one needs to reevaluate everything that Thady says and does in light of his namesake. Highlighting Thady's personal characteristics allows for an explanation of his interactions with the Rackrents and therefore reflects on the internal relationship he has with himself.

A reading of the character of Thady as drastically more conniving has found support in the notion that "'the lower Irish are such acute observers, that there is no deceiving them as to the state of the real feelings of their superiors', Maria Edgeworth remarked in her continuation of her father's *Memoirs*" (cited in Tracy 11). This act is represented throughout *Castle Rackrent* with Thady coyly placing interjections into his narrative that would be unnecessary if the sole purpose of his verbalizations was biographic in nature. For example, when referring to Sir Murtagh, Thady reflects that

> He was a very learned man in the law, and had the character of it; *but how it was I can't tell*, these suits that he carried cost him a power of money – in the end he sold some hundreds a year of the family estate- but he was a very learned man in the law, *and I know nothing of the matter except having a great regard for the family*."(Edgeworth, 16; italics added)

Thady alludes to Sir Murtagh's inadequacies as a lawyer, by declaring that "but how it was I can't tell" (Edgeworth 16), only to immediately rebuke what he just stated by professing that "I know nothing of the matter except having a great regard for the family" (Edgeworth 16). Thady's trickery lies in his deception, because he knows very well that Sir Murtagh is not a good lawyer, due to the fact that at this time Thady's son Jason is in school learning law. Even if Thady is ignorant to the technicalities of the practice of law, it does not take much understanding for one to recognize whether another wins the vast majority of his cases or if he does not. As a result, Thady not only encourages Sir Murtagh to continue friviously wasting his money on legal cases that bear him no further social status or revenues, but also Thady professes to the reader that he does in fact allow this practice to go unchecked.

As a result of this, "the evidence of Thady's astuteness lies largely concealed, but breaks through not once or twice, merely, but time and again – often enough and subtly enough to prove both the author's intentions and her subtle artistry" (Newcomer 147). Repeatedly Thady declares that he "said nothing, for [he] had a regard for the family, but [he] walked about, thinking" Edgeworth 21). However, due to the aforementioned analysis of his namesake and his cunning in other matters, one must also filter this statement through the fact that Thady has been shown to mean something different than his words initially appear to mean. Nothing that Thady says can be taken at face value. Edgeworth does not intend for the reader to trust the latent meaning of the narrator's words, but instead delve deeper in order to discover the manifest meaning that she has strategically traced in relationships and human interactions. Neill reads Thady in a paranoid manner, arguing that "again and again he stresses his tactful silences (pp. 12, 21, 28, 45, 46), only to reveal that his real motive is less to protect his masters' public face than to preserve himself from 'ill will' (pp. 55, 96)" (89). Therefore, keeping his mouth shut does not reflect an

enduring relationship between servant and master, but instead it shows the reader a servant who understands the social dynamics of his situation and holds his tongue in order to preserve the much more important internal relationship with himself, which will benefit him more. The reality of the situation is that even if Thady did speak up, his masters would not hear his criticisms, because he is in the position of a member of the serving class. Even in speaking the utter truth to his masters about their character flaws, the social class discrepancy between the two would mark Tahdy's thoughts as inconsequential.

Thady had found a way around this power dynamic. By remaining true to himself and cultivating a more clever internal dialogue, Thady not only empowers himself by revealing the incompetence of the Rackrents, but also brings about his social rise through their social decline. "By giving Thady the power to narrate, Maria Edgeworth gives him the power to rule the story and so the plot the future of the Rackrents, the Quirks, and the future of Ireland" (Tracy 17). The use of this power reveals that Thady holds himself with a higher regard than he holds the Rackrents.

Thady consistently exhibits behavior that places himself and his own interests above everyone else while acting as if his personal identity exists completely of his masters' identity. By Thady revealing the problems of the Rackrent family to the reader, holding his tongue, and feigning alliance with that family over his own son, he exhibits whatever behavior will allow him to stay on the path towards social mobility. Even though he claims that "little did I think at the time, or till long after, how I was harboring my poor master's greatest of enemies myself" (Edgeworth 58), and explicitly refers to the aforementioned representations of his personal "arts of subordination" throughout *Castle Rackrent*. It is ultimately "Thady [who] finds the man and delivers the information that together destroy the Rackrents" (Newcomer 149) and Thady alone

who has both the drive and opportunity to do so.

While Thady does most overtly act in order to improve Jason's social status, if Jason, as a son, is considered an extenuation of his father, then Thady in helping Jason to achieve social and economic stability is helping himself[6]. While the historical interpretation[7] of Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* has portrayed Thady as "a passive observer, not a participant in the battle between Sir Condy and Jason" (Cochran 60), it is in reality Thady who strategically uses his "arts of subordination" in subtle ways that enables Jason to be able to embark upon his combat with Sir Condy.

While Thady often speaks against his son, Jason, throughout the entirety of the novel, he does not act in one way that would hinder Jason from obtaining the Rackrent estate. For instance, when the deed is being signed over into the Quirk name, Thady professes that he cannot bear witness and sign the sheet. Thady confesses, "so he signed – and the man who brought in the punch witnessed it, for I was not able, but crying like a child; and besides, Jason said, which I was glad of, that I was no fit witness, being so old and doating" (Edgeworth 78). Thady structures this scene so that the reader assumes he is crying for the loss of Sir Condy Rackrent. However, it is just as likely that those tears are tears of joy, because his only flesh-and-blood son has become an estate-owning gentleman. As seen through Thady's alliances to different Rackrent characters, the most important and enduring relationships are those between blood relations. Regardless of this preexisting template for social alliances, Thady argues that he "was grieved and sick at heart for [his] poor master, and couldn't but speak" (Edgeworth 77). The ambiguity of this situation places the meaning of Thady's tears in the mind of each individual

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[6] "Thady is successful, though, through Jason" (Newcomer, 147).

[7] "George Watson's view, that "the narrator is not, like Crusoe, the central actor in the drama, but an observer merely" is echoed by Marilyn Butler: "a narrator who is not an active participant in the story"" (Glover, 298-299).

reader. However, it has already been shown that Thady is an untrustworthy narrator. For this reason alone it becomes imperative for one to be wary of all of his statements (especially this one as it is the central action in the novel) and only trust his actions.

When one analyzes the times in which Thady is driven to action, his intent[8] becomes irrelevant, because without Thady acting as a central figure directing the individuals around him in certain directions, the Quirks would never have obtained the Rackrent estate during his lifetime. It is true that Thady does not explicitly stand up against the Rackrent family and publicly pronounce his support of his son. In fact, to the careless reader his actions appear to be that of the exact opposite[9]. However, "Castle *Rackrent* runs to fewer than 30,000 words" (153) and "the expressions 'my son' and 'my son Jason' occur no fewer than thirty times in the short novel" (Newcomer 148). Therefore, for every 1,000 words Thady directs the focus of the novel back to his relationship with Jason[10]. While Thady is forced to act in subtle ways, due to the limited amount of socially appropriate actions for a servant to exhibit, he does in fact use these options to the best of not only his ability but also to the best that they can be used by any servant as a result of him representing all Irish servants. Literary critic Tracy reveals that:

> Thady is a servant, and can only use a servant's tricks of flattery, petty theft, and spying. Jason builds on the privileged position his father has attained, and Thady's intimate knowledge of the Rackrents' affairs. His training as a lawyer enables him to use this knowledge to steal the estate legally. (18)

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[8] As Newcomer reveals, "Thady may not have planned that Jason displace the Rackrents, but the groundwork that Thady lays makes it possible for Jason to seize the opportunities that come his way" (147).

[9] "'Oh Jason! Jason! How will you stand to this in the face of the county, and all who now you, says I); and what will people think and say, when they see you living here in Castle Rackrent, and the lawful owner turned out of the seat of his ancestors, without a cabin to put his head into, or so much as a potatoe to eat?" (Edgeworth, 77)

[10] "Not only does the frequency attract attention, but also the situations in which Thady emphasizes his relationship with Jason" (Newcomer, 148) are strategically placed.

In light of Thady's role as a servant, he directs the narrative in ways that may not be perceived by a reader who is unaware of the behaviors available to a servant.

Thady does, however, speak "a good word for [his] son, and [gives] out in the country, that nobody need bid against us" (Edgeworth 22). Thady uses his leverage as a servant intimate with the Rackrent family to allow his son the chance to own his first patch of land. In addition, Thady verbally aligns himself with Jason, by using the pronoun "us" instead of "him". While this may be a ploy in order to allow Thady's reputation to protect Jason's investment from other bidders and Thady would not share in the possession of the land, he still goes against previous assertions and proclaims his loyalty to his son[11]. However, Thady's meddling in Jason's affairs cannot be written off as a simple favor because it does not stop here.

Instead, he repeatedly warns and helps his son to achieve what is presumed to be both of their goals: "and the mob grew go great and so loud I was frighted, and made my way back to the house to warn my son to make his escape, or hide himself for fear of the consequences" (Edgeworth 79). While Thady is powerless in this situation to calm the crowd or solve this problem for Jason, he does introduce the topic for discussion in the presence of Sir Condy who, being the appeasable gentleman that Thady structured him to be, steps up and quiets the crowd.

Therefore, Thady Quirk successfully manipulates his masters through unquestioned, socially appropriate behaviors that result in his elevation in social class. The skills Thady develops in relation to the three distinct alliances that constitute his life become the template for future servant narrators in English literature.

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[11] "To look at me, you would hardly think 'poor Thady' was the father of attorney Quirk; he is a high gentleman, and never minds what poor Thady says, and having better than 1500 a-year, landed estate, looks down upon honest Thady, but I wash my hands of his doings, and as I have lived so will I die, true and loyal to *the family*. – The family of the Rackrents" (Edgeworth, 8).

Chapter Two

Ms. Dean: The Sly Servant

Emily Bronte creates within *Wuthering Heights* a world where the complexity of human relationships is the most importance influence on one's life. Decades of critics have praised Bronte for developing one of the most simultaneously powerful and disturbing love stories ever written. However, Catherine and Heathcliff's turbulent romance exists only secondary to the complexities of *Wuthering Heights'* central relationship, that between master and servant. Ellen Dean, the Earnshaw's servant lives and grows amongst the members of this family. Throughout the story line she follows the assumed main characters as they reach adulthood. In fact, Ellen seems to not exist outside of the context of her masters' lives.

Due to this, Ellen Dean, like Thady Quirk, exists as an example of a feudal servant who voluntarily retells a particular history of her master's lives to an outside audience[12]. Reflecting on the events to an individual removed from the social implications of the Heights (Mr. Lockwood) allows Ellen to strategically reveal how she has created a world separate from outside society where ultimately she wields control over her masters' fate. Unlike Thady who has external pressures attaching him to his own blood relationships, Ellen's social connections exist entirely within her master's family. Ellen needs more than a physical place of belonging, she also requires the emotional attachments characteristic of humankind[13]. Therefore Ellen's simultaneous role as outside and insider within her family unit complicates her needs from the masters. Despite Ellen existing as a more complicated version of Thady Quirk, she successfully implements the same "arts of subordination": feigned allegiance, astute perception, and selective

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[12] "Finally he comes to a dim awareness, if not an admission, that he has stepped into a land and a dwelling which are thoroughly incomprehensible, where none of his mundane methods of perception will apply" (Brick 81).

[13] These emotional motivations for Ellen's manipulations will be explored in Chapter 3.

disclosure. Ellen Dean uses these "arts of subordination" in conjunction with her understanding of the master-slave relationship to overcome the assumed powerlessness of servitude, and therefore gain economic security.

Almost immediately after Lockwood[14] passes the narrative of Wuthering Heights off to Ellen's voice, she begins positioning herself within the social lives of the Earnshaws, her first masters. Even whilst introducing the individuals of Lockwood's interest, Ellen momentarily confuses her relationship with the masters when she states, "our Miss Cathy is of us – I mean, of the Lintons" (Bronte 34). By including herself as a Linton twice in this quote, Ellen Dean depicts herself as more kin than servant, an act that is representative of a feudal servant. This association is further developed when she reveals that during her childhood she "got used to playing with the children – [she] ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set [her] to" (Bronte 35). While Ellen discloses that she does perform the functions of a typical servant, this confession only an afterthought tagged onto the description of her personal relationship with the Earnshaws. As a result of Ellen's self-disclosure, she alludes to an enduring allegiance to her masters, even as the explicit surname of her masters changes from Earnshaw to Linton.

However, what Ellen more subtly reveals is that while it is true that this relationship exists, the nature of the relationship is more complicated than originally presented. While she is a human being, subject to the biases and preferences of all people, Ellen repeatedly exposes in her narrative that to some degree this association with her masters is feigned. The first example of this is seen when she describes Heathcliff's introduction to the rest of the family. She

[14] Lockwood mirrors the editor of Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent. They both represent a set of inappropriate perceptions that when compared to the voice of the servant-narrator makes him or her appear more transparent and therefore representative of the truth. See page 25.

confesses that while "Miss Cathy and he were now very thick…Hindley hated him, and to say the truth I did the same; and we plagued and went on with him shamefully" (Bronte 38). Despite Ellen's own verbalization of dislike for Heathcliff, as his servant she nurses him when he is sick and later she "suppose[s] he felt [she] did a good deal for him, and he hadn't wit to guess that [she] was compelled to do it" (Bronte 38). This singular story simultaneously reveals several different aspects of Ellen's character. Firstly, that through her reflections she interjects her own biases into the narrative (will be further addressed below). Secondly, she successfully fulfills her required role as a servant, even when asked to care for someone she has ill feelings towards. And thirdly, she possesses the mastery over her own actions to make an individual she has openly stated that she does not like, feel an intimate bond with her.

This ability to manipulate another's sense of reality is what allows for Ellen to gain control over the lives of her masters and therefore over her own life. Robbins comments that such relationships exist below the surface in many master-servant relationships; he says, "the closer one looks, in fact, the more numerous are the slips for which fidelity has prepared the ground" (67). This introduces the idea that was originally seen in Thady Quirk, in which the servant's unquestioned allegiance allows him or her enough freedom to direct the master's actions. By Ellen nursing Heathcliff and therefore saving his life, despite her personal feelings for him, she presents herself as a servant with perpetual loyalty to her masters. As a result, later in the narrative this reputation gives Ellen great influence to use her words to directly lead her masters down life paths of Ellen's own best interests despite what is actually best for the masters. Robbins reveals that in the majority of cases, this servant direction is then seen in the novel around situations where the masters are said to have made a mistake or done something wrong, which relates to the action being in only Ellen's best interest.

While Ellen's position of servant-narrator of the family history allows her the power to influence almost every character within *Wuthering Heights*, she most explicitly and drastically feigns a destructive loyalty to Catherine I. Like her interactions with Heathcliff, time and time again, Ellen makes passive comments to Lockwood and therefore the reader as to her negative feelings directed towards Catherine I. To say the least, Ellen describes her as wild, spoiled, and reckless. She even goes as far as to confess taking a degree of pleasure from Catherine I's pain: "I've had many a laugh at her perplexities and untold troubles, which she vainly strove to hide from my mockery" (Bronte 68). This quotation illuminates Ellen as uncompassionate and demeaning towards Catherine I's feelings. Then a few sentences later Ellen transitions from this dislike of Catherine I to revealing to the reader that the two did in fact share an intimate bond. Catherine I "did bring herself, finally to confess, and confide in [Ellen]. There was not a soul else that she might fashion into an adviser" (Bronte 68). Therefore, both as a result of the seclusion of the Heights and Ellen's cunning personality, the servant becomes keeper of the master's innermost secrets.

Ellen's intimate relationship with her superiors (Robbins) that results from her perceived allegiance provides Ellen with the ability to advise and therefore explicitly direct the direction of future action by becoming a powerful voice within not only the family history but also within the minds of the individual family members. An example of one such session between Ellen and Catherine I is the scene where the two are talking about her options for a husband:

> 'Well, that settles it – if you have only to do with the present, marry Mr Linton'
> 'I don't want your permission for that – I *shall* marry him; and yet, you have not told me whether I'm right.'
> 'Perfectly right; if people be right to marry only for the present.' (Bronte 79)

In this interchange, Catherine I's dependence upon Ellen's opinion is blatantly obvious. Catherine I needs Ellen to tell her whether or not, in Ellen's opinion, Catherine I has made the

right decision, because Ellen has acquired power in relation to Catherine I's most intimate thoughts. This therefore puts Ellen in exactly the position of power she has constructed by means of her feigned allegiance to Catherine I. In this moment, Ellen not only has the opportunity to direct the future of the master but she also strategically takes advantage of it.

Since Ellen views herself as the "but one sensible soul in its [the Grange's] walls," (Bronte 120) the relationships with her masters must be to some degree merely an illusion for show, because one cannot respect another if he or she believe the others to be fools. Therefore, the credibility that many readers place in Ellen's narration of the events in Wuthering Heights (Watson) is in actuality misplaced. Ellen's slyness is so perfected that the reader, like the masters, takes for granted her honesty. Ellen is said to "lend further credibility to the story by recounting only what she has seen or heard" (Watson 96); however, this is far from accurate. Ellen Dean continuously reflects and comments on every last action that takes place in this novel. By interjecting her own thoughts into the narration, one takes them as facts due to her close relationship with the other characters and knowledge of the social constructions of community shared between the Heights and the Grange. The fact that these side comments are unquestionably taken by the characters and the reader as true ultimately reveals the power[15] resulting from Ellen's feigned alliances.

Ellen is able to make the most of these relationships based on her skills as an astute observer. Lockwood initially describes her as "the housekeeper, a matronly lady taken as a fixture along with the house" (Bronte 9). Ellen fits into her surroundings so precisely that she

[15] This power must be coyly wielded and represented, because "the notion that the people could or do possess power, or that power might even inhere in their very skepticism and exteriority, has never been anything other than morally suspect when it has not simply been identified with evil itself" (Robbins 98). Ellen's skills as a manipulative narrator rely on her ability to make the masters and the reader have complete trust in her.

effectively becomes part of the scenery, a transparent eye[16]. In many situations in this novel where the dramatic action is between the higher-class characters, Ellen does appear to momentarily disappear from the room. One such example is when Catherine I and Isabella are fighting over Heathcliff and Catherine I tells him, "here are two people sadly in need of a third to thaw the ice between them…nay, it's not Nelly; don't look at her" (Bronte 105). When Catherine is speaking to Heathcliff she acts as if there are only two people beside him in the room when there are actually three, including Ellen. While this position attempts to transform Ellen into something less than human, it is a powerful tool in her repertoire of appropriate "arts of subordination". As a result, her ability to simultaneously be present and absent from every major interaction within *Wuthering Heights* gives Ellen the ability to acquire more knowledge of the relationships, and therefore more power over the relationships that drive the novel than any other character.

Being this observant theoretically allows for Ellen to be an extremely reliable narrator, because she has the ability to recall small interactions and entire conversations. Ellen not only remembers the actual events that took place on any given day at the Heights, but also she is so connected with her own feelings that she can remember exactly what she thought during each event. In light of Ellen's assumed perfect recount of these events and attached feelings, one must assume that they had some significance in her individual life. Therefore she no longer exists as an unbiased, passive observer to the actions of her masters. One example of Ellen's emotionally charged narrative reflects on the day in which the Linton family came to visit the Heights, Ellen informs the reader:

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[16] In R.W. Emerson's essay entitled "Nature" he creates the image of the all-knowing observer: "I become a transparent eyeball-I am nothing; I see all."

> I did not call [Catherine I] unfeeling long, for I perceived she was in purgatory throughout the day, and wearying to find an opportunity of getting by herself, or paying a visit to Heathcliff, who had been locked up by the master, as I discovered, on endeavouring to introduce to him a private mess of victuals. (Bronte 60)

Ellen's commentary on this action places her squarely within the masters' interaction. While her vocalization of her feelings allows Ellen to separate herself from the purely physical role of a mere servant, she proves at least subtle understanding of this mechanism by choosing to follow Catherine I "up in the dark" (Bronte 61) to gain a greater understanding of their discourse. In this act Ellen is showing interest in not only the physical needs of her masters, btu also their emotional connections to one another.

It is within Ellen's role as a servant to tend to the children that she has cared for throughout their entire lives, and therefore one could argue that her choice to follow Catherine I upstairs is merely an attempt of loyalty. However, due to Ellen's aforementioned distaste for Catherine and Heathcliff, it is also possible that she could perform such action with ulterior motives in mind. "Nelly Dean", Shunami argues "performs as just a minor character and has a very limited conception of what occurs in the plot, [therefore, she] must transmit to the reader all of the information concerning the novel's protagonists and their activities, she has to obtain her material from "external" and arbitrary "sources" (452). Based on this argument, Shunami would claim that Ellen follows Catherine I upstairs with the innocent purpose of obtaining more concrete information regarding her masters.

However, Lockwood himself attributes more intelligence to Ellen when she declares:

> 'Expecting a few provincialisms of slight consequence, you have no marks of the manners that I am habituated to consider as peculiar to your class. I am sure you have thought a great deal more than the generality of servants think. You have been compelled to cultivate your reflective facilities, for want of occasions for frittering your life away in silly trifles.' Mrs Dean laughed. (Bronte 63)

If Lockwood's assessment of Ellen Dean is correct, then she is more perceptive than what is typical for a servant to be. Her perception is repeatedly shown to be especially keen in the area

of other's feelings. This exceptional ability to reflect upon the events of the world around her provides Ellen with an essential skill to use within her intimate relationship with the masters of the novel.

The fact that Ellen exists as the only character who lives throughout the entirety of the story allows her to be "a far more essential and profound perceiver far closer to a full understanding of the mysteries of *Wuthering Heights*" (Brick 84) surrounding the complex human connections than anyone else within the story line. When compared to an outsider such as Lockwood who "has come from a society where anything lying on a parlor cushion *would* be cats" (Brick 81; italics included), Ellen interprets the events she witnesses with a more appropriate schema. Unlike Lockwood, Ellen does understand the events that take place throughout Wuthering Heights (McCarthy). She understands what is going on so completely that this understanding allows her to interact within the framework of the masters' actions and direct the narrative.

The fact that Ellen simultaneously narrates a story that she in fact belongs to allows for her involvement within the story. "The inability to be involved is what distinguished Lockwood from Nelly Dean" (McCarthy 56). For Ellen, the observations and reflections that she constantly makes throughout *Wuthering Heights* give her ammunition in the form of information to manipulate and direct the lives of her masters. This power of control allows Ellen, as the servant-narrator command over the direction of what should be the private aspects of her masters' personal lives.

An example of this influence is that it is Ellen who most adamantly works to position Heathcliff and Edgar Linton as enemies. By commenting on the intention behind the interactions she observes, Ellen is responsible for planting the idea of rivalry between the two boys. While

she says that, Linton "ventured this remark without any intention to insult; but Heathcliff's violent nature was not prepared to endure the appearance of impertinence from whome he seemed to hate, even them, as a rival" (Bronte 59), she is neither in Linton's mind nor privy (at the time of this interaction) to his inner thoughts. As a result, she has no way to know whether or not he meant the insult he bestowed upon Heathcliff any more than she knows for certain at this point whether Heathcliff harbors hate for Linton. In light of this it becomes obvious that Ellen's extrapolations from her observations are not by default accurate. By presenting them to the reader as such, it is assumed that she also made such assertions to her masters.[17] Therefore, Ellen is shown to have a direct influence on the emotional environment of her masters. Despite her being "incapable of recognizing the fact that her decisions bring about the tragic crisis of the novel" (Shunami 457), Ellen is repeatedly seen toying with the feelings of her masters' before each of the major events in the novel.

In addition to sharing her own opinions of the others to influence each individual master, Ellen uses the proximity to her masters as well as the observations she has accumulated in order to create for herself the power to selectively choose what information to share and what to keep hidden. "The result, moreover, is a misunderstanding which exerts itself in giving bad advice and at times causes harm to the protagonists" (Shunami 451). This strategic use of her knowledge translates into authority for Ellen use in effectively shaping and therefore directing the plots of her masters' lives.

The reader sees in Ellen a small aspect of Thady Quirk who is famous for not speaking against the Rackrent family. Ellen too reveals that she understands there are times when holding one's tongue to preserve the appearance of loyalty is most important. Referring to Heathcliff and

[17] See analysis of Catherine I and Heathcliff's quarrel in Chapter Three.

Catherine I, the two characters who Ellen is more verbal in her dislike for, she says, "many a time I've cried to myself to watch them growing more reckless daily, and I not daring to speak a syllable for fear of losing the small power I still retained over the unfriended creatures" (Bronte 47). In choosing not to speak against these two characters, the reader sees the lengths Ellen will go to in order to preserve her relationship with her masters. However, she does not preserve this relationship for the joy it brings her or for the sake of being a friend, but for the explicit reason of having power over them. While in the above quotation she demeans the degree of her influence as an "art of subordination" in and of itself, she still explicitly acknowledges that she has at least some power over their activity. In this justification for her actions, Ellen emerges not as a powerless servant, but by her own explanation as an empowered figure.

As time passes and Ellen becomes more confident in her ability to direct the story line as these events are occurring, she becomes even more blatant with her decisions to divulge secrets throughout the other characters at the Heights. When Catherine I explicitly asks, "'Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?" (Bronte 77), Ellen's immediate response is, "is it worth keeping?" (Bronte 77). By giving Ellen the choice as to keep a secret or not in turn gives her the power to not only narrate the story of Wuthering Heights after the fact, but also the power to influence the narrative as it is being enacted. Robbins declares that it is in fact the servant "through whom, in short, the business of divulging decisive information is largely carried on" (Robbins 92). As a result, Ellen in being the sly servant is actually being the prototypal servant. Ellen's trickery is magnified by the fact that she presents herself as an emotionally distant subordinate who does not want to be hoarder of the information relating to her masters' lives. Despite the aforementioned quotation that reveals Ellen going out of her way to follow Catherine I upstairs (presumably to hear more of her conversation with Heathcliff) still, she says:

> 'If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss, ' I said, 'it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else, that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. But, trouble me with no more secretes. I'll not promise to keep them.'
> 'You'll keep that?' she asked, eagerly.
> 'No, I'll not promise,' I repeated. (Bronte 83)

This interchange, while ensuring that Catherine I will continue to try to use her as a confidant, also frees Ellen from any implied obligation to keep Catherine I's secret. As a result, Ellen effectively gains ownership over Catherine I's private thoughts and therefore Ellen is free to use them at her own disclosure.

Through such subtle word games, Ellen manipulates her masters and therefore, this act "discloses that she is entangled in the plot much more deeply than would seem at first glance" (Shunami 449). This complication arises as a result of Ellen using the information she has to elicit the best possible response from her audience. When commenting on Catherine I's death to Lockwood, Ellen implies that she "fear[s] we have no right to think she is [in Heaven]: but we'll leave her with her Maker" (Bronte 167). However, in light of her knowledge concerning Heathcliff's close attachment to Catherine I she does not provide for him any negative information concerning Catherine I's actions that lead Ellen to believe she is in Hell. Instead she says that Catherine I has "gone to heaven, I hope, where we may, everyone, join her, if we take due warning, and leave our evil ways to follow good" (Bronte 168). In light of Ellen only telling Heathcliff a select few things about Catherine I she now, like in his childhood[18], creates an atmosphere that allows for Heathcliff to continue loving Catherine I. However, this selectivity results in "Nelly lack[ing] the qualities and qualifications necessary for her to be a reliable narrator" (Shunami 449), due to the fact that she as much the author to the story of Catherine I and Heathcliff as Emily Bronte is the author of *Wuthering Heights*.

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[18] See analysis on page 20 where Ellen devotedly nurses Heathcliff back to health as a child. If she would had not have saved his life he would have never been able to develop a more intimate relationship with Catherine I later.

Ellen's "total involvement in the lives of the Wuthering Heights household" (McCarthy 53) by means of her intimate, albeit feigned, relationship with her masters, her continuous observations, and selective disclosure over what each of her masters knows about the others provides her with the power to direct the fates of all others. In addition, Ellen's proficiency at each of these acquired behaviors further gives her the ability to effectively be, like Thady Quirk, her masters' master.

Chapter Three

Ms. Dean: Nelly's Narrative

Of the many concurrent plotlines intertwining throughout *Wuthering Heights*, Watson declares that the central focus of a novel is the character that "not only acts and suffers, but causes others to act and suffer" (89). While, Watson subsequently attributes these actions to Heathcliff, Nelly Dean also performs all of these functions throughout Bronte's masterpiece. Unlike Heathcliff, however, Nelly remains a constant influencing presence throughout the entirety of *Wuthering Heights*. At the conclusion of the novel, Nelly is the only living character who has witnessed all of the important events firsthand. While this theoretically allows Nelly to disclose the entirety of her masters' story, the syntax of Nelly's narrative reveals her own emotional desires directly influencing all of the story's defining actions. Therefore, Nelly Dean proves to not merely have economic motivations (as was seen by Thady Quirk in *Castle Rackrent*), but also emotional needs that further direct the course of her masters' lives: the first generation Earnshaws, the first generation Lintons and finally the second generation mix of the two families. These emotional needs interconnect the parallel plotlines of her masters' stories to her own, and thus allows Nelly to be seen as complex a character as any of the others. Ultimately, Nelly is most motivated by her subordinate social class to use the excuse of telling her masters' stories to tell her own life's narrative.

From the very beginning of her narrative, Nelly reveals herself as a distinct individual, instead of the typical inaudible "servant's hand" (Tracy) represented in Victorian literature. Due to her "mother [having] nursed Mr Hindley Earnshaw" (Bronte 35), Nelly has agency to place herself squarely within the action of the world of the Heights from the time of her own infancy. While Nelly quickly grazes over this fact when introducing Lockwood to herself and her relation

to the Heights, she still immediately mentions this connection. This apparently small fact is shown to be extremely important to the development of Nelly's adult personality. Shunami declares Nelly has "a feeling of imagined equality with the Earnshaw family thus developed in her from an early age. She consider[s] herself a part of this family, with all of the responsibilities and privileges which that entails" (454). This emotional connection with the masters' family is to be expected of the feudal servant, because "according to common usage, servants did not look for work, like other members of their class, but for a 'place'" (Robbins 53). Nelly's perception of her intimate relationship with the Earnshaw family, her initial masters, connects her more to her masters than was even seen by the strong-willed Thady Quirk. Thady has his son, Jason, to fulfill his emotional needs, and therefore uses the Rackrent family for the economic security provided by their physical estate. However, Nelly's sense of familial belonging within the Earnshaw household exists as her only form of emotional connection. Therefore, her motivations behind her "arts of subordination" become more complex than purely the economic ones that this analysis has already revealed.

The story line reveals this lasting intimacy between Nelly and her masters when she discloses that Hindley's "barely twenty-seven, it seems; that's [her] own age…[they] were born in one year" (Bronte 186). It would appear that Nelly's mother nursed both Hindley and Nelly from the same breast at the same time. Therefore, from a very early age the two are connected through Nelly's mother who nourished and (at least for a time) cared for them both. This connection elevates Nelly (within her own mind) from the role of the feudal servant who makes a house out of his masters' land to the role of a sibling who in effect is emotionally equal with her masters. Nelly's assumed friendship with Hindley strengthens her belonging within the Earnshaw family. The close relationship exhibited between Nelly and the Earnshaws is

legitimized by the fact "that the word 'family' derives from the Latin *famulus*, or 'servant'…'family' continued to mean not a small group of immediate blood-relations but what we would now call a 'household,' that is, the blood relations *plus the servants*" (Robbins, 111). Nelly's intrusion into the social fabric of the Earnshaw household is therefore not only permitted, but also it is expected. However, playing the part of a sister, does not pardon Nelly from the other half of her identity as a servant.

While Nelly neither dwells nor explicitly states that Hindley and she were emotionally connected or even friends, the repetition in which she refers to their small interactions alludes to a more powerful relationship than even Lockwood passes onto the reader[19]. It makes logical sense that while Cathy and Heathcliff were running around the moors, Nelly and Hindley (two children of the same age) would also pass time together by creating lasting memories of their own. Hindley and Nelly would have had to spend a good deal of time together to not only find a special place but also to hold "it as a favourite spot" (Bronte 108) as Nelly reflects in her narrative. The existence of this common spot, selectively held in high esteem by only Nelly and Hindley, legitimizes her other allusions to a special relationship between the two.

Not only does Nelly reflect upon this memory "twenty years later" (Bronte 108), but also when she recounts the earlier years of her life, she repeatedly takes Hindley's side by explicitly interjecting herself into the action of the novel to protect him. Nelly "persuade[s] him [Heathcliff] easily to let [her] lay the blame of his bruises on the horse" (Bronte 40). This allegiance persists into their adulthood after the death of Frances[20]. However, Nelly very

[19] Due to Lockwood's incorrect assumptions about everything else he encounters it is not a stretch to assume that he would also be oblivious of Nelly's subtle allusions to a relationship with Hindley.

[20] It is important to note that Hindley kept the existence of his marriage to Frances hidden even (or especially) from Nelly until his return to the Heights after Mr. Earnshaw's death.

conscientiously does not provide detailed recounts of the conversations she has with Hindley. Upon first glance one would suppose that they barely knew one another, but it is Nelly who cares enough for his reputation to "persuade [her] conscience that it was [her] duty to warn him how people talked regarding his ways; and then [she has] recollected his confirmed bad habits, and, hopeless of benefiting him, have flinched from re-entering the dismal house doubting if [she] could bear to be taken at [her] word" (Bronte 108). As will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow, Nelly only interjects herself into the action of the novel to benefit herself and her own ambitions. Therefore, she must have some personal tie connecting her to the fate of Hindley, because she posits no other explanation for why she would go out of her way to confront him of his disgraceful behavior.

Upon hearing of Hindley's early death, Nelly "confess[es] this blow was greater to [her] than the shock of Mrs Linton's death: ancient associations lingered round [her] heart; [she] sat down in the porch, and wept as for a blood relation, desiring Kenneth to get another servant to introduce him to the master" (Bronte 186). While Nelly refers to the emotional connection with Hindley, as one of a "blood relation" this could also reflect within her mind a deeper, more intimate love between the two characters. The narration only dulls this claim by attempting to desexualize Nelly as a woman. Although Lockwood referring to Nelly as Mrs. Dean was socially acceptable at the time, within the social environment of the Heights this label denies Nelly the femininity of an available sexual figure. Lockwood's desexualized portrayal of Nelly's sexual should not be trusted, because his "fickleness and ignorance of his own character make him a thoroughly unreliable narrator, for he judges others according to his own ideas of himself" (McCarthy 51). Nowhere else in the narrative is there any allusion to Nelly being married or

having any love interest other than with Hindley. As a result, the story line is ambiguous enough to allow for a romantic relationship between Hindley and Nelly to exist.

Whether Nelly and Hindley were at one point sexually involved, the fact of the matter remains that the Nelly-Hindley-Frances component of the overall plot line mirrors the Heathcliff-Catherine I-Edgar story. In both love triangles, the legitimate Earnshaw child turns his or her back upon an intense (however erratic) love for a more suppressed love proposed by the upper class. Nelly proves the strength of her attachment to Hindley through her emotional reaction to the news of his death. Nelly expresses herself firstly as a mourning family member and therefore is incapable of performing her required functions as a servant. The emotional bond between her and this one particular master is greater than the attachment that accompanies the feudal bond of servitude. Her "old master and foster brother had a claim on [her] services" (Bronte 186) and her heart.

Nelly's narrative of her own life becomes much more complicated due to her required role to care for the Earnshaw children, Hindley included. She refers to them as "the little souls" (Bronte 44), despite them being relatively the same age as herself. The fact remains that "Nelly Dean is a character possessing a unique personality. She is specifically linked to the narrative pattern of the novel as one of the performers in it when she, like the others, behaves out of motives which are personal and at times even selfish" (Shunami 453). It could be for this personal reason why Nelly has such an aversion to Catherine I and chooses to act on this dislike: "I've said I did not love her; and rather relished mortifying her vanity, now and then; besides, she hurt me extremely, so I started up from my knees, and screamed out" (Bronte 71). While her descriptions of Catherine I[21] may be correct, it is just as likely as they are over exaggerations

[21] See analysis in Chapter Two.

spurned out of jealously that Catherine is a legitimate sister to Hindley and also manages to have a strong relationship with Heathcliff[22] (one whom Nelly perceives as socially inferior to herself).

While it is arguable whether Nelly actually knows that Heathcliff could hear the conversation regarding Catherine I's respective loves for her two suitors, Nelly was aware that he was outside and took no precautions to warn Catherine I of discretion. Instead Nelly waits a good while until after Heathcliff has already run away to "whisper to Catherine [I] that he had heard a good part of what she said, [Nelly] was sure; and told how [she] saw him quit the kitchen just as she complained of her brother's conduct regarding him" (Bronte 83). Therefore, Nelly's own jealously of and desire to "mortify [Catherine I's] vanity" (Bronte 71) has a direct negative impact on Heathcliff's life. Nelly creates the environment that enables Heathcliff to overhear Catherine I emotionally betray him, which in turn results in Heathcliff inflicting vengeance upon the rest of the characters within the novel. If Nelly would have been able to overcome her distaste for Catherine I, then two decades of pain and misery could have been averted.

However, there is also the aspect of Ellen's potential for economic security of her professional position that motivates her to push a marriage with Edgar Linton upon Catherine I. Nelly, as a professional woman, sees a union with Edgar Linton as more advantageous for Nelly as Catherine I's servant, and therefore advises Catherine I "to value him the more for his affection" (Bronte 99). It is through Nelly's vantage point as an intermediate that Catherine I develops into the alleged fickle character presented in *Wuthering Heights*. It is only after Catherine I's death that Nelly admits to "twist[ing] the two [locks of Heathcliff and Edgar's

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[22] McCarthy remarks that "the story of Heathcliff and Catherine is, in a way, [Nelly's] own life story – so much of the time Nelly is talking of herself – and one of the complex issues of Wuthering Heights is deciding the bias and reliability of Nelly Dean" (56). However, it is also possible that the relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine parallels a relationship that may have at one point actually existed or was even hoped for between Hindley and Nelly before he left the Heights.

hair], and enclose[ing] them together" (Bronte 170), thus acknowledging her important role in separating them during Catherine I's lifetime. Some readers have attempted to state that "Ellen is merely the agent of fate; these things would have happened whether Ellen had intervened" (Watson 96). However, it is hard to rationalize away the numerous times she deliberately pushes characters into the line of action that is not only economically, but also emotionally in her best interest[23].

In order to fully realize Nelly's awareness of her own power over the plot line of her masters' lives, one must acknowledge the equivalencies of Nelly and Heathcliff. As, Watson explicitly states, Heathcliff is "a creature about whose past nothing is known" (89). While previous analysis has shown that the same is true of Lockwood's trusted servant narrator Ellen Dean[24], decades of readers have overlooked this connection between these two prominent figures. The similarity of Heathcliff and Nelly as outsiders in the Earnshaw family who somehow have found a way to simultaneously belong and not belong creates an undeniable emotional parallel between the two.

Despite the fact that Nelly professes allegiance with Hindley and repeatedly takes his side against Heathcliff, she also strategically interferes in Heathcliff's life in attempts to direct it when it suits her own ambitions. After Catherine I transforms from the rugged tom-boy of her youth to a young lady, Nelly pleads with Heathcliff to "let me dress you smart before Miss Cathy comes out – and then you can sit together, with the whole hearth to yourselves, and have a long chatter till bedtime" (Bronte 56). One could read this passage and take from it the belief that Nelly is "sympathetic to the suffering of others, she is always prepared to assist with good advice. She therefore can be seen as a type of ideal figure" (Shunami 453). However, in

[23] Nelly "is the direct agent of much of its action" (McCarthy 56).
[24] This is especially in relation to any romantic attachments formed between her masters.

following with Shunami's previous assertion that Nelly, as a developed character, is capable of selfishness it is equally likely that she attempts to reunite the two friends for a less righteous purpose. While one is unaware if Nelly sees herself reflected in Heathcliff, but if she is as astute an observer as literary critics make her out to be (Watson, McCarthy) then it is highly likely that she, herself, has picked up on the aforementioned connections that intertwine both Heathcliff's and her own personal developments.

Watson claims that "Catherine [I] alone stands as a near equal to Heathcliff. Beautiful, selfish, willful, she strides through the first part of *Wuthering Heights* like the queen that she is. She understands Heathcliff because she is like him" (93). While Catherine I and Heathcliff have grown up together, Nelly too, although marginalized, has been consistently present in Heathcliff's life. Unlike Catherine I, she too was brought into the family at one point or another and despite her growing to feel a degree of belonging with the Earnshaws, she never quite achieves the Earnshaw name. Nelly and Heathcliff are made to do manual, as befitting a servant, while this is never asked of Catherine I or Hindley. In light of this, if "Catherine [I] understands Heathcliff because she is like him", Nelly, too, has such an understanding of Heathcliff, which supports the aforementioned motivations for her interventions into Heathcliff's relationship with Catherine I.

Further evidence for the mutual understanding Heathcliff and Nelly have of one another is shown through Heathcliff's hostility towards having Nelly overhear his conversations: "I was not aware there were eaves-droppers,' muttered the detected villain. 'Worthy Mrs Dean, I like you, but I don't like your double dealing'" (Bronte 233). This exists as one example of several times throughout the later half of the narrative where Heathcliff verbally acknowledges Nelly's role in shaping the lives of all of those around her, and he attempts to regain control over his own

existence. While Catherine I and Edgar both acknowledge Nelly's role in certain isolated situations, Heathcliff is the only character similar enough to Nelly to fully process the scope of her skills and motivations as a servant-narrator.

This parallel is seen when Edgar confronts Nelly, declaring, "I desire no further advice from you…you knew your mistress's nature, and you encouraged me to harass her. And not to give me on hint of how she has been these three days! It was heartless! Months of sickness could not cause such a change!" (Bronte 128) Although Edgar recognizes that Nelly has had some role in the events that directly precedes Catherine I's illness, his higher social class position renders him incapable of seeing Nelly's true motives through her "arts of subordination." For this reason, Edgar cannot perceive her as overtly manipulative. He is unaware that Nelly has effectively constructed the love triangle between himself, Catherine I, and Heathcliff in order for Nelly to always be the central figure of the action. One explicitly sees Nelly's invisible hand meddling with Edgar's life in the scene prior to the development of Catherine I's sickness:

> 'Ellen,' said he, when I reentered, 'have you seen your mistress?'
> 'Yes, she's in the kitchen, sir,' I answered. 'She's sadly put out by Mr Heathcliff's behaviour: and, indeed, I do think it's time to arrange his visits on another footing. There's harm in being too soft, and not it's come to this -.' (Bronte 113)

Only under Nelly's forceful suggestion does Edgar interrupt Catherine I and Heathcliff's argument and demands that Catherine I choose one or the other. It is only the result of Nelly's strategic exploitation of Edgar and Heathcliff as counterparts that this pivotal interaction in the overall story line occurs. Nelly overtly directs the mutual jealously between these two, because in making them into enemies Nelly becomes imperative to both of their relationships with Catherine I. While it is undoubtedly true that neither man is in the other's favor they both attempt to tolerate each other for Catherine I's sake. Heathcliff later confesses to Nelly that he:

> …never would have banished [Edgar] from her society, as long as she desired his. The moment her regard ceased, [Heathcliff] would have torn his heart out, and drank his blood! But, till then – if you don't believe me, you don't know me – till then, I would have died by inches before I touched a single hair of his head! (Bronte 148)

Due to Nelly's meddling, this quotation embodies how Edgar perceives the situation between Catherine I and Heathcliff when he interferes. For all intents and purposes Nelly told Edgar that Catherine I was enraged with Heathcliff and therefore gave him the go-ahead to step in and unleash years of animosity on his only competition for Catherine I's affection. Therefore, Nelly finally releases her own vengeance upon Catherine I vicariously through both Edgar and Heathcliff.

Nelly's treachery continues due to her desire to "not wish to 'frighten' [Catherine I's] husband, as she said, and multiply his annoyances for the purpose of serving her selfishness….[Nelly] said nothing when [she] met the master coming towards the parlour; but [instead] took the liberty of turning back to listen whether they would resume their quarrel together" (Bronte 117). As a result of this quarrel Catherine I blames both Edgar and Heathcliff for her death. However in reality, "the fate of the masters is placed in the hands of their servants" (Robbins 41). It is Nelly whose voice wields the power to lead others into action. Catherine I, upon her deathbed, gets even closer to truly seeing Nelly as manipulative[25]. Catherine I declares, "Ah! Nelly has played traitor…Nelly is my hidden enemy – you witch!" (Bronte 128) However, Catherine does not overtly make the connection between this isolated incident and the many times throughout her life when Nelly has the jealousy between Edgar and Heathcliff.

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[25] The reactions of Heathcliff, Edgar and Catherine to Nelly's interferences, provide evidence that perhaps Nelly is neither a passive observer or one who always has their best interests at heart. Perhaps like Lockwood, she "bestows [her] own attributes over-liberally on" (Bronte 6) them.

Nelly reveals to the reader that she is conscious of this power when she declares that, "I also threw little light on his inquiries, for I hardly knew what to hide, and what to reveal" (Bronte 264). Knowledge of her master's private thoughts is what gives Nelly the power to create situations in accordance with her own desires. Only when she is unaware of how to most effectively use a piece of information to manipulate her masters does she question keeping her mouth shut. Therefore, this internal debate is seen as Nelly's motivation for only giving Edgar Linton a little information in the aforementioned quote.

Through her interactions with numerous characters, Nelly repeatedly shows that she has no problem passing along bits of information that are told to her in secrecy. This is most explicitly seen in her relationship with Catherine II when little Cathy pleads:

> 'You'll not tell, will you? It will be very heartless if you do.'
> 'I'll make up my mind on that point by to-morrow, Miss Catherine,' I replied. 'It requires some study; and so I'll leave you to your rest, ad go think it over.'
> I thought I over aloud, in my master's presence; walking straight form her room to his, and relating the whole story, with the exception of her conversations with her cousin, and any mention of Hareton. (Bronte 254)

Despite the desires of Catherine II, Nelly wishes the visits between Catherine II and Linton to end because there is no way that such an interaction could further help Nelly. By this point in the narration, it is clear that Linton is close to death, and therefore Linton would not be able to provide Nelly another generation of family. In order for Nelly to receive the emotional fulfillment she attempts to create, there needs to be potential for a continued familial lineage. In addition, if the two were married, Nelly's servitude would be passed onto Heathcliff, the individual who at this point in the narrative she has the least control over. For these reasons, Nelly has no moral difficultly taking her information and presenting it to Edgar, even though she explicitly told Catherine II that she would think it over before making a decision. Nelly does this without thinking of what would happen to Catherine II if she falls in love with Linton. Instead of explicitly facilitating a connection between the two, Nelly passively observed their developing

romance up until this point. Nelly only springs to action when her individual person stands to gain something as a result.

With the second generation, Nelly blatantly puts her own interests above that of the masters and "is thus turned into an even more unreliable narrator than she was in the first part" (Shunami 458). Nelly interjects herself into all discussions of Catherine II's options for the future, as if the two women were an inseparable pair. Not only does Nelly "interpos[e] the pressing fact of [her] own existence between the master and his news" (Robbins 70), but she also unites herself with Catherine II by using the pronoun "we". She tells Lockwood that, "we had just agreed the best destiny which could await Catherine [II], would be a permission to continue resident at the Grange, at least, during Linton's life: he being allowed to join her there, and I to remain as housekeeper" (Bronte 286). However, Nelly's is the only voice the reader hears concerning such decisions.

On occasion, Nelly even goes as far as to place her own future before that of Catherine II's when she confesses, "yet I did hope, and began to cheer up under the prospect of retaining *my home*, and *my employment*, and above all, *my beloved young mistress.*" (Bronte 286; italics added) Having the basic human essentials of shelter and means of nourishment are described as less important than preserving the emotional connection with Catherine II. While Nelly is capable of partaking in actions that she knows directly disagrees with Catherine II's wishes, she inevitably chooses to cultivate a close relationship with Catherine II, because this provides Nelly with a personal connection that leads to Nelly's emotional security. Nelly is effectively the mother of both Catherine II and Hareton[26]. By their union her respective relationships with both of them allow for Nelly to be places in the powerful wielding position of matriarch of the new

[26] "You know, they both appeared in a measure, my children" (Bronte 321).

family. In this final action in the novel, Nelly achieves both the economic and emotional stability needed form her masters.

Nelly relies on her emotional relationship with Catherine II for the acquisition of both of her overarching desires. Like Thady raises Sir Condy to be exactly the type of master he wanted, Nelly raises Catherine II to be easily manipulated. This relationship is contrasted to the one between Heathcliff and Nelly at the end of the novel, wherein Heathcliff fully recognizes Nelly's motives and therefore impedes her manipulation of him. Nelly's "arts of subordination" do not allow her to manipulate Heathcliff and as a result she is unable to achieve her desired social mobility under him.

However, Nelly's alliance with Catherine II is shown to ensure the social rise that Nelly has strived for throughout the entirety of *Wuthering Heights* and therefore her life. While Robbins argues that the life of the literary servant completely encompasses that of his or her master's life and therefore the servant has no desires outside of the master's desires, Nelly actively expresses her own aspirations. Nelly reveals to Lockwood that she possesses knowledge of the working world superior to that of Catherine II. While Catherine II "had not learnt to manage her affairs yet, [Nelly] act[s] for her; there's nobody else" (Bronte 309). Therefore, Nelly takes on the role of mother, teacher, and manager once Catherine II takes control of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange[27]. Nelly confesses that she "obey[s] joyfully, for Catherine [II]'s sake" (Bronte 310), but based on her actions thus far in the novel, Nelly would not partake in such an activity if it did not offer her some reward. She therefore takes pride in her ability to overcome the social situation she was born into and rise as a mere servant to both

[27] "He maintains that Nelly Dean plots to gain control over the two estates-and she could accomplish this only after the removal of Heathcliff and her assuming authority over Cathy" (Shunami 451).

matriarch and the manager of the estate. In light of this, the struggle throughout *Wuthering Heights* can be read as Nelly's personal development from a replaceable servant to an irreplaceable mother.

Conclusion

This thesis principally addresses issues of class as represented through the narrative agency exercised by the servant-narrator in *Castle Rackrent* and *Wuthering Heights*. Highlighting the direct relationship between narration and power over the plot line makes the invisible implicit resistance of the servant-narrator visible to the reader. By manipulating the events in the story as they initially unfold, the servant-narrator becomes not only indispensable to the plot line, but also to the masters' lives. The servant-narrator exists as the central character within the novel that actually tells his or her own life story. The interpretations of the servant-narrator are not something one must "become increasingly discontented with" (Brick 84) in order to arrive at the core of the book. Instead, these reflections upon the story line are the most important parts of the novel. Therefore, the complex relationship between servant and master is given voice and significance within literary analysis.

By legitimizing the servant-narrator's relationship with the master, the influence of human relationships on the events in one's life becomes much more apparent. Acknowledging that members of lower social classes have influence over the direction of socially superior classes begins to eliminate the socially accepted class hierarchy: "to consider [Bronte's masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights*,] merely the account of Heathcliff's and Catherine's love is…fantastic" (Watson 88). It implies a particular upper class set of values regarding the strict separation between social classes. These external pressures from society would be seen as too great for even this love to overcome, and as a result instruct others to not even waste the time or emotions involved. This perspective is distinctively from the upper class in attempts to preserve the alleged purity of their social network. However, when one acknowledges that Ms. Dean, for her own purposes, has a very manipulative part in the separation of Heathcliff and Catherine the

assumed set of social values set forth by this novel changes dramatically. Once the power of the feudal servant-narrator is recognized, *Wuthering Heights* actually reveals the immense degree of power at the disposal of the servant-narrator. Therefore, power exists as one factor that is actually wielded by both the upper and lower classes, making them more similar than different.

Another force that unifies all social classes is the motivations of economic and emotional security. Once the reader acknowledges that the servant-narrator is his or her own individual with personal motivations, they no longer exist as a transparent filter through which upper class issues are expressed. Instead, the servant-narrator voice actively shapes and directs the lives of his or her masters. Regardless, Edgeworth shows an uncanny faith in the truthfulness of servants' statements: "the short and the long of it was, I couldn't tell what to make of her, so I left her to herself, and went straight down to the servants' hall to learn something for certain about her" (25). However, Thady and Ms. Dean, both servants themselves, have explicitly been shown for their own self-motivated purposes to intentionally withhold information from their masters. Therefore, all assertions, particularly depictions of relationships, set forth by the servant-narrator must be interpreted as already filtered through one distinct set of cultural and world beliefs. By feeding the reader only the servant-narrator's particular perception of the events within the story line does not guaranteed that the truth will be revealed. In light of this the social classes are once again equalized, because the lower class becomes as equally untrustworthy as the upper class.

The servant-narrator's assumed unconditional loyalty to the master reveals the substantial degree of power actually wielded by this representative of the lower class. Robbins agrees that, "strangely enough, it is often when the servant's opposition is most loyal, when it emerges neither into consciousness nor into the plot, that it makes its most radical statements" (68). By acknowledging the difference between the syntax and the semantics of the novel, the reader

becomes more fully aware that the socially accepted inequalities between the classes are strategically used as a guise. The servant-narrator cannot be trusted to be constantly loyal, because he or she uses this relationship to hide one's resistance. Therefore, feigned loyalty provides the agency for the servant-narrator to interact with the master on equal grounds.

The servant-narrator and the masters are involved in a relationship of mutual dependency, wherein each party exerts power over the other. Although the servant-narrator uses "arts of subordination", which exhibits power in relation to that of the masters', this is still a potent form of power. Especially because these acts are often unnoticed by the masters, the servant-narrator has unchecked agency to manipulate the events that constitute the masters' lives. Therefore the relationship between the servant-narrator and the masters allows one to question of the issues surrounding the existence of social class hierarchy.

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